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ABSTRACT

The educational passport seems to be one of those ideas whose time has come. The passport is a document that contains a student's credentials from the educational world. The passport is the student's personal property that can be used in moves from high school to college, from college to college, from school to job, from job to school, and so on. This paper takes up three aspects of the passport idea as developed at the Educational Testing Service: (1) reasons for developing the passport; (2) characteristics of the passport; and (3) issues and problems concerning the passport. The passport itself would be a single sheet of microfiche in an envelope. On the microfiche would be all the characteristics of one's educational progress; for example, high school grades, recommendations from teachers, scores, college grades, instructor's comments, narrative testimonies, summaries of special projects or special training, outcomes of experiential learning, personal statements of accomplishment, and so on. The student would be able to include in the passport what he chooses, and a student can construct his own passport if he chooses. Reproduced from best available copy. (Author/PG)

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THE EDUCATIONAL PASSPORT

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The educational passport seems to be one of those ideas whose time has come. We have begun to develop the passport concept at the Educational Testing Service and we expect to conduct field trials with students next year.

The passport is a document which contains a student's credentials from the educational world. The passport is the student's personal property which the student can use to move from high school to college, from college to college, from school to job, from job to school, and so on.

This paper takes up three aspects of the passport idea: 1) reasons for developing the passport, 2) characteristics of the passport, 3) issues and problems to be resolved.

Reasons

The genesis of the idea lies in the changing nature of postsecondary education, the changes taking place in the population participating in postsecondary education, and the impact on the processes of entry and reentry into the educational system. This is not the place to discuss these changes in detail but we will point to discussions in depth which do exist.

Priorities for Action, The Final Report of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (1) begins with the statement: "The extension of formal education into more and more of the lives of more and more of the people has been one of the great social developments in the United States, and the world, in recent centuries." The Carnegie report goes on to say: "We have been moving toward the

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age of (Hutchins') 'Learning Society' in the sense that nearly every person beyond early childhood would come to have formal educational opportunities available in nearly every circumstance of life, and many, if not most, would avail themselves of these opportunities." Clark Kerr's commission then points to the troublesome adjustment from mass higher education to universal-access higher education, an adjustment underway in most recent years which involves not only "universal access for members of the 'college-age' population, but "universal access for persons of all ages." (1)

Similarly, the report of the Commission on Nontraditional Study, Diversity by Design (2), contains the central conclusion that "Lifetime learning--basic, continuing, and recurrent--has a new appropriateness today and requires a new pattern of support." Indeed, recommendation number one, among fifty-seven by Samuel B. Gould's Commission, reads as follows: "Full educational opportunity should be realistically available and feasible for all who may benefit from it, whatever their condition of life." The report cites survey statistics in support of the contention that there are large numbers of adults interested in continuing education, i.e., there are some 2.5 million people working toward a degree outside the traditional four-year pattern and there are some 13.5 million who say they would like to do so. (2)

To further describe the context in which the passport idea emerged there is the work of K. Patricia Cross which culminated in the excellent book Beyond the Open Door.(3) Summarizing research findings on high school graduates entering some form of postsecondary education, Dr. Cross observes that: "The egalitarian era is rapidly approaching; most young people are already pursuing postsecondary education." The authoress then projects characteristics of the "new students" increasingly

entering postsecondary education and she indicates the kinds of educational problems which must be faced (including larger numbers with low academic ability). (3)

At this point I hope we have sufficiently established the illustrious and impeccable heritage of this child, the educational passport. Without revealing the true parents, we have insinuated important familial connections--Clark Kerr, Sam Gould, Pat Cross--not to mention Jossey-Bass and McGraw-Hill. In fact, we believe that the educational passport, if it truly serves students in a learning society, will be warmly received by those cited.

It is doubtful that ETS would be proposing the development of something called an educational passport if we were still in an era when "going to college" meant just that, i.e., a one-time movement from four years of secondary school to four years of college. But, as the literature has indicated, the pursuit of education beyond secondary school today means many different things to many different people.

To illustrate with gross figures, there are approximately 3.3 million high school graduates each year and approximately one-third of these go directly to four-year colleges, approximately 11 percent go to two-year academic colleges, and 5 percent to two-year technical colleges. Thus, half the high school graduates start out in college although less than half of these graduate from their initial colleges "on schedule."

The other half of the high school graduating class goes in different directions, with perhaps 50 percent entering jobs directly.

Of the remainder, some 9 percent go to vocational-technical schools, and smaller percentages enter apprenticeships and the military services where their formal education is continued.

We have already noted the large number of adults in college degree programs and those studying in job training programs, or attending local schools, is even larger, i.e., some 3.5 million in each category.

To make the statistics more complex, students simply won't stay in their educational categories any more! Perfectly good college students quit and go to work and perfectly good workers quit and go to college. Students from community colleges transfer into four-year colleges while graduates of four-year colleges take postgraduate work at community colleges. Mature women rush back to college for courses in the psychology and sociology of male dominance as their spouses seek formal instruction in modern techniques of housewifery and midwifery. In the midst of this academic chaos and scholarly disorder we thought an idea as simple as the educational passport just might help.

The Passport

The passport itself is nothing but a single 3" x 5" sheet of microfiche in an appropriate envelope or folder. The microfiche is durable, inexpensive, and easily read and copied. On the sheet of microfiche, in photographically reduced form, are all those things about one's educational progress which one might want to keep and present, for example, high school grades, recommendations from teachers, scores, college grades, instructors' comments, narrative testimonies, summaries of special projects or special training, outcomes of experiential learning, personal statements of accomplishment, and so on. The student can include in the passport what he chooses and, indeed, a student can construct his own passport if he chooses.

In practice, regional and national educational agencies which have trained personnel and equipment will, in all likelihood, prepare passports in behalf of students and update passports at the request of students. When a student wants to enroll in an educational program he will simply present his passport to the educational institution where credentials can be reviewed on the spot using an inexpensive microfiche viewer. An index will help the institution get to categories of information in the passport which are of special interest. If the institution wants a basic, permanent record for the student who is admitted (or employed) this can be supplied, at the student's request, by the agency which issued the passport.

Problems and Issues

Nothing in academe is, of course, as simple as it seems. We can quickly list issues and problems in four areas: 1) ethical considerations, 2) policy and organization, 3) procedural and technical considerations, and 4) the economics of the educational passport system.

With regard to ethics, we believe that the individual must determine and control what material is contained in the passport, how and when it is updated, when and to whom it is issued. But beyond that central position there are, of course, other important problems including the need to guarantee the authenticity of documents when decisions are made from passports which affect the lives and careers of individuals and the integrity of institutions.

Problems of policy and organization are, perhaps, even thornier. We can start with this question: Recognizing that the registries of individual colleges and universities have traditionally taken prime responsibility for recording and transcripting student credentials, who, then, should run the passport system in behalf of students? Next question: Will local and regional passport

agencies be more convenient and effective, or will national passport systems be necessary to serve a mobile, adult, student population? And, if students send records, or have records sent, to regional or national passport agencies, what will be the political and procedural and financial arrangements with the teaching institutions? There are plenty of additional questions in this category.

With respect to procedural and technical aspects, we must evaluate and select systems and equipment which work easily and efficiently; we must develop passport indexing, procedures for passport agencies, time requirements, updating cycles, and much more.

Finally, the financial viability of the educational passport is still to be determined although we have encountered, through informal channels, very considerable student interest. Ahead is further analysis of the actual need and demand for passports, cost estimating for alternative systems models, and projections of fee structures which would permit a break-even operation.

This is work in which we are increasingly engaged because we believe that passports will enhance the progress of those pursuing their education in different ways, at different times.

In addition to simplifying the admissions process for all concerned, we believe the passport will permit a student to present himself in broader terms than grades and test scores alone. The passport is really a composite biography and should reduce tension between those who view education as mere credentialing and those interested in the learning experience as such. Further, the passport will permit the recording of

learning experiences on the job, in the community, overseas--learning experiences which the typical academic transcript does not easily accommodate. Thus, the passport will assist in evaluating an individual's overall progress in attaining his educational goals and will help in planning next steps. The passport will also facilitate counseling because the individual's collected history is so readily available to teachers and counselors.

Taken together, the ideas presented here should: 1) enhance access to postsecondary education for countless individuals, 2) promote more meaningful and flexible learning experiences by broadening evaluation beyond letter grades and scores, and 3) increase the effectiveness of educational counseling and planning.

References

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3. Beyond the Open Door, K. Cross, Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1971.